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The University of Southern Mississippi

PILGRIMAGE TO THE BIRTHPLACE OF ELVIS PRESLEY

By

Joseph Samuel Miller

A Thesis

Submitted to the Honors College of
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in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degrees of
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Approved by

Jeffrey C. Kaufmann
Professor of Anthropology

J. O. Joby Bass
Associate Professor of Geography

Amy Chasteen Miller, Chair
Department of Anthropology and Sociology

Clifton 'Skeeter' Dixon, Chair
Department of Geography and Geology

David R. Davies, Dean
Honors College

ABSTRACT

At the Elvis Presley birthplace in Tupelo, Mississippi, a sacred, secular pilgrimage is taking place. This study used the categories of myths, symbols, and experiences to understand the perceptions of the pilgrims at the birthplace. Using a combination of interviews and mapping, the themes and data presented show that the area has a clear distinction of sacred space, which was defined by the relics in the spaces that Elvis physically interacted with. The pilgrim related to these symbols through strong, varied mythological content. A mapping component illustrated the international spatial distribution of pilgrims to the birthplace and confirms that it is an international pilgrimage site. This research agrees with previous studies to show that Elvis Presley was a multi-faceted celebrity who connected to all different types of people with multiple characteristics.

Key Terms:

Pilgrimage

Elvis Presley

Myths

Symbols

Experiences

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T. C. B.

Introduction

In the 1950s, a poor white southern boy from Tupelo, Mississippi named Elvis Presley changed the course of American culture forever. He became a pop-culture icon known as the “King of rock-and-roll,” a sex symbol, and a representation of racial and political tension. Born into a low income family in 1935, Elvis Aaron Presley first discovered his love for music through gospel hymns at church. Through his teenage years, he became a misfit and a rebel, dressing in pink and black and growing long sideburns to go along with his iconic wave hairstyle. Into his adulthood, he worked as a truck driver and a machinist, but everything changed when he went to Sun Studios in Memphis, Tennessee in 1953 to record a song for his mother. He was first listed as a “good ballad singer,” but he went back a year later to record a separate demo and in the process recorded his version of “That’s All Right.” The song exemplified how Elvis could make the blues sound like music of independence and joy while being part country and part rhythm-and-blues. When his first record came out, radio stations could not categorize his music; some feared he was too country for some audiences and too black for others. But all audiences were listening to his music. Elvis had a unique tone and sound, and he made “rockabilly” accessible to a popular, teenage audience. He soon grew as a memorable performer with a powerful and seductive stage presence (Altschuler 2003).

Apart from his music career, he had a resume that included serving in the army, acting in more than thirty films, and having a run of 1,126 shows in Las Vegas in the last

eight years of his life (Doss 2008, p.127). Since his death in 1977, Elvis continues to live on through the many dimensions of his life to which people can relate. There are presently over 500 fan clubs organized in his honor, and with the release of Elvis's *Number Ones* greatest hits album in 2002, it became a chart-topping best seller (Doss 2008). From his poor Southern childhood to world stardom, his sexual gyrations to his drug addiction, his time in the military to having a family, Elvis Presley was and still is a symbol of America.

Martha Rigby (2001) wrote that, to some, the life of Elvis Presley is like the life of a religious figure that died as a martyr in a sacrifice to fame. Since his fans can no



Figure 1: Birthplace of Elvis Presley

longer come into direct contact with Elvis, people desire the next best thing – spending time at the sites where he lived his life. Fans are now traveling to his homes in order to physically reach Elvis Presley. Continuing the metaphor of Elvis as a religious figure, fans are traveling to his birthplace and homes and in many cases are defining those places as sacred spaces in much the same way that religious pilgrims do in relation to religious sites. The two homes that have gained the most attention are Graceland in Memphis, Tennessee, and his birthplace home in Tupelo, Mississippi.

Graceland is the most popular site of pilgrimages for Elvis fans. As his last home and final resting place, it is the most toured home in the United States, attracting over 600,000 fans every year (Doss 2008). This National Historic Landmark also serves as the headquarters of Elvis Presley Enterprises, which earned \$60 million in 2010, making Elvis the second-highest earning dead celebrity next to Michael Jackson (Rose and Pomerantz 2010). Southeast of Memphis, Presley's birthplace in Tupelo, Mississippi, features his childhood home and church where people can enter and tour. His birthplace (Figure 1) has fewer visitors than Graceland and has also received much less scholarly attention (Alderman 2002). Before Elvis became a star in the 1950s, this house was an ordinary Mississippi home; it was ordinary space. Over time the residence was given special meaning and the space became sacred. Today, like all other pilgrimages, the primary goal of the pilgrimage to Presley's birthplace is to experience this sacred space.

The concept of pilgrimage is complex. A pilgrimage site must be fixed in space, prompting a geographical distribution of visitors. Traditionally, a pilgrimage was an

occurrence in religious context, defined by Peter Jan Margry (2008) as “a journey based on religious or spiritual inspiration, undertaken by individuals or groups, to a place that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than of everyday life, to seek a specific cult object for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional, or physical healing or benefit” (p. 17). Margry has thus claimed that a secular pilgrimage, as in the case of Elvis Presley’s birthplace, may be inconsistent with “true” pilgrimage due to the simple fact that if something is secular it is the total opposite of religious (Margry 2008). Juan Eduardo Campo (1998) placed pilgrimage sites such as Elvis Presley’s birthplace in Tupelo into the category of “cultural religious heritage” since global attention has led to new pilgrimage landscapes that are negotiated as sacred. He argues that these sites should be viewed as pilgrimage sites because of the human attention and negotiated effort that has made them sacred. Therefore, a space does not necessarily have to be religious in order to be sacred. Churches are sacred spaces and so are the gravesites of celebrities. Perhaps to some people, a pilgrimage to see the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame may have just as much sacred meaning as a pilgrimage to see the St. James Cathedral in Spain.

The number of people taking pilgrimages is growing worldwide, and pilgrimages are becoming more accessible given advancements in transportation, education, and attention in the media (Reader 2007). Even though research in religious tourism still lacks an appropriate understanding of a pilgrim’s worldview (Digance 2003; Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2004; Kreiner 2010), researchers are increasingly finding pilgrims and tourists to have similar characteristics (Digance 2003; Kreiner, 2010). The titles “pilgrim” and “tourist” both describe one who searches for a space that represents a central idea of a

socio-cultural meaning, but a “tourist” usually acknowledges multiple cultural boundaries that he or she intends to cross with equal satisfaction (Bar and Hattab 2003). Victor and Edith Turner (1978) notably stated that “a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist” (p. 121). Holistically, pilgrims will display a variety of behaviors, and due to the rise of secular pilgrimages like the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C., Jim Morrison’s gravesite in Paris, and even Walt Disney World, evolving behavior in the ways that spaces are given sacred meanings should be expected (Margry 2008).

The initial cause of a pilgrimage is to reach a sacred space, and this space must be enclosed by ordinary space. The sacred space of a pilgrimage is usually made up of an object or relic that a pilgrim hopes will bring some form of identity, enlightenment, salvation, miracle, hope, healing, or escape (Digance 2003; Kreiner 2010; Melczer 1993; Moore 1980). As pilgrims encounter the object or relic, pilgrims encounter myths, symbols, and experiences through which they assert sacred meaning. Victor Turner (1969) came to the forefront of pilgrimage studies in the 1970s with his theory that pilgrimages consist of people who share sacred meanings, and together, they make up “communitas” that involve liminal behavior and rites of passage. While this theory holds true for pilgrims who break away from their ordinary lifestyle and have a transformative experience when embarking on pilgrimage, research has shown that this behavior is not mandatory for a pilgrimage (Margry 2008). A pilgrim can partake in a pilgrimage on an individual basis, and a pilgrim may or may not have a transformative experience at the site.

Pilgrims and visitors to secular places like Elvis's birthplace are constantly redefining sacred spaces. Using the meanings derived from the cultural landscape, an individual's decision of how the area affects his or her life passes through some form of communication. Such communicated negotiations, which occur in all cultural landscapes, contain meanings dependent upon the individual and his or her sense of place (Kyle and Chick 2007; Basso 1996). As a place is examined in conceptual thought, one unconsciously interprets it as sacred or profane space, and if a spiritual quality is present, it is sacred (Ley 1994). People negotiate their decisions and this causes ordinary space such as a country home to be converted over time into sacred space like a shrine for Elvis. Once this space begins to have sacred meaning, this space will begin to influence the behaviors of its inhabitants (Digance 2003; Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart 2008).

At the time of contact between the pilgrim and the sacred entity, a pilgrim uses prior knowledge of doctrinal and mythological content that will determine how symbols at the location shape the meaning he or she gives to the site. A pilgrim shapes an experience from these meanings, and in cyclic fashion, a meaning is shaped from these experiences (Digance 2003; Kreiner 2010; Moore 1980). In the case of Elvis Presley's birthplace, the birthplace is the sacred space and the tourists are the pilgrims who decide that it is sacred. Visitors to this place bring meanings of Elvis to the place, making it sacred space. The people that come to this site, the ideas that people have at this site, from where these people come, and why these people come all make this place sacred. The perceptions of the sacred space are created and shared among the people that make them, but the final negotiated meanings reflect certain characteristics about the people

who share them (Basso 1996). So while pilgrims increasingly reinforce the notion that Elvis Presley's birthplace is sacred, how they give meaning to what they see and experience has not been well understood.

This thesis, describes the manner in which sacred elements associated with pilgrimages are used and experienced at Elvis Presley's birthplace in Tupelo, Mississippi. Specifically, this research explores how the secular pilgrims to the Elvis site perceive the experience as possessing sacred qualities through myths, symbols, and experiences. I intend to explore the extent to which the Elvis site is viewed as a sacred place by exploring the meanings that the pilgrims give to Elvis Presley's birthplace.

Literature Review

To properly navigate various studies on how pilgrims perceive sacred sites of their pilgrimage, this study will use three different characteristics of pilgrimage sites that will help structure the meanings of a secular pilgrimage site. These three characteristics are symbols, myths, and experiences (Digance 2003; Kreiner 2010; Melczer 1993; Moore 1980; Turner 1978). The mythological element contributes understood meanings of why a legendary figure, landscape, action, or entity has made a specific place sacred. The symbols link the myths to physical objects such as relics and features of the cultural landscape. Experiences at sacred places acknowledge the symbols and myths as authentic and unique. Myths, symbols, and experiences help explain the overall meaning that pilgrims have given to a site in order to make it sacred, and these elements can be found in both religious and secular pilgrimage sites.

Myths

For this research, a myth is considered a part of the history or legend of a sacred entity that is either truth or fiction and involves stories and folklore that communicate the widespread understanding of how an entity is understood to be sacred (Moore 1980). Myths that relate to Elvis Presley are stories of his life, rock-and-roll memoirs, his music, his movies, biographies, television shows, concert footage, stories of concerts, and any other form of communicated system that preserve the actions or a reference of Presley. For example, music has a sense of place and this can cause someone to recall feelings of

the past, a specific beginning, and thoughts of gratitude. Its use in media, social activities, and individual situations provides a mental archive of culture and time (Cohen 1995). Music acts as an identification of thought and feeling, causing people to link various styles of music to different generations. Although his music was only a portion of Elvis's life, understanding the relationship between music and mythology parallels the other facets of Elvis's life.

As his home and place of burial, Graceland is the most visited site of pilgrimage for Elvis Presley. Here, people remember the mythology of a man who was an American icon. Erika Doss (2008) explained that the many different ways that Elvis reaches the lives of his fans determines how the sacred space is interpreted. These pilgrims used mythology of Elvis to bring sacred meaning to Graceland. At the site, pilgrims recalled Elvis as a rockabilly rebel and the sex icon of a generation, but on a deeper level, many viewed him as a part of the style, music, and lifestyle of both white and black cultures. People have also remembered Elvis as an example of well-earned success as they recall Elvis's rags to riches story or his later image of performing in Las Vegas wearing his famous white jumpsuit. Pilgrims must negotiate a variety of Elvis's images proposed by the owners of Graceland, Elvis Presley Enterprises: a gentleman, a soldier, a movie star, a family man, a philanthropist, a political activist, and a drug addict. Some even give Elvis the qualities of a saint, praying to Christ through him. Not all of the people who visit the site are fans of Elvis though, but Doss adds that even these visitors are contributing to the interpretation of Presley and Graceland (Doss 2008).

In Derek Alderman's (2002) study of the inscriptions made by pilgrims onto the fieldstone wall that surrounds Presley's Graceland, he analyzed the writing to understand how people interpreted and gave meaning to Presley. Alderman determined that the writings on the wall showed that the pilgrims to this site viewed Elvis in four different ways. First, they saw him as "The American Dream" as they wrote comments about his poor childhood that blossomed into wealth. Some of these writings asked for money or brought attention to Graceland's decoration or Elvis's vehicles. Another way these pilgrims viewed Elvis was by "Food and Consumption." The tour of Graceland shares information of Elvis's favorite foods, but some pilgrims have independently made their interpretation of Elvis based on the amount of weight that he gained in the last years of his life. Different writings shared the fans' connection between Elvis and peanut-butter sandwiches and potato chips. Next, pilgrims to Graceland viewed "Elvis as Sex and Romance." These writings drew on the physical appeal of Elvis, his mannerisms, and his performances. Along with the obvious writings of longing for Elvis in a sexual and romantic way, pilgrims criticized Elvis's physical characteristics, made homosexual remarks, commented on Elvis's loved-ones in a sexual and romantic way, and asked for Elvis's help in their love life. The last way people interpreted Elvis in their writings was as "Family." People remembered Elvis's parents and his immediate family. Some commented on Elvis's daughter Lisa Marie marrying pop-music icon Michael Jackson. Other pilgrims wrote about how their own family inspired a love for Elvis Presley or even how family members despised Presley. Some pilgrims acknowledged that their family members are now in Heaven with Elvis. Some even brought Elvis into their own

family by naming their own children after him. As Alderman (2002) points out, this inclusion of Presley into family showed how people viewed their relationship with Elvis.

Apart from Elvis, myths also played a strong role at John Lennon's Strawberry Fields memorial in New York City. Robert Kruse (2003) concluded that the songs written by John Lennon were the primary factor that caused people to visit this site. The pilgrims to this site explained that his lyrical content and political reasoning were the major myths that have been shared and negotiated by their culture, and to this extent, they believe those themes were the most important of Lennon. The pilgrims recalled past memories of personal activities in their life, that included Lennon's music within their explanations, and these memories shaped how the myths became a major part of their life. Using the mythological element of Lennon, the memorial has long been noted as a place for the troubled residents of New York City, a place of resistance to authority, and a memorial for the time and age of the 1960s (Kruse 2003).

Aside from music pilgrimages, mythology is a contributing factor to the foundation of religions, making it easy to witness how myths affect a religious pilgrimage site. In the case of the Christian religious pilgrimage site, The Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City, the myths of this particular site originated in visions of the Virgin Mary by well known individuals. These views have now become translated into views of social relations between different ethnic origins and are brought out by the sacred site (Zamanian 2007). For Mount Athos, a sacred shrine in Greece, the area serves as a sacred religious area for Christianity. Although the doctrine of Christianity played a major role in the meaning of the pilgrimage, some pilgrims claimed that the journey to Athos was

the main motivational factor for taking the pilgrimage while others said God was their primary reason for traveling (Andriotis 2009).

In comparison to a religious pilgrimage, the pilgrims to the Gettysburg National Military Park are drawn to the site because of the mythology, and after touring the site, the pilgrims still claimed that the historical element was the most intriguing part (Gatewood and Cameron 2004). After listing history, the pilgrims expressed that the beauty or dramatic effect of the battlefield was the next most important part of the site, followed by a personal connection, and then specific features. When asked why they visited the site, the majority answered with a “casual” or “serious” interest in history, and then said it was a convenient stop on the way to their destination. This study of the Gettysburg National Military Park is a prime example of how myths are the originating factor of pilgrimages, and it also shows the evolving behavior in how some pilgrimages have included “convenient stops” on the course of a larger trip (Gatewood and Cameron 2004).

Although Walt Disney World may not be considered a commemorative site like the other sites mentioned, it is a prime example of a site that has developed a mythology from the creation of legendary heroes and villains. The concepts and values that were created by Walt Disney World have now become a set of shared and negotiated values and principles embraced by Disney fans. As the fans enter Walt Disney World, the mythology is carried over into the actions and landscape of the theme park in examples such as the theatrical performances, amusement rides, music from movies, and people in

costumes of Disney characters. Together, these actions keep these myths within the secular sacred space (Moore 1980).

The mythology of a site can also be created from one particular event, or in the case of Salzburg, Germany's "The Sound of Music" pilgrimage, the mythology can come from a single movie (Graml 2005). The importance of the mythology at this sacred site is that it has caused differing perceptions between the locals and the pilgrims. The locals and the pilgrims both viewed the site as sacred, but the locals attached a national pride to the location. The pilgrims come to the site with the preconceived assumption that the mythology portrayed in the film will parallel the actual location, only to be disappointed that this is not true. The reason the locals play an important role in "The Sound of Music" pilgrimage is because of their control over the mythological element of the site. Because of their conflicting perception of the mythology, the pilgrims' sense of place is becoming lost in an arrangement of unrelated items at the pilgrimage site. This study shows that pilgrims have a need to authenticate the myths they know, and if this is not successful, the pilgrims may not be successful in their pilgrimage (Graml 2005).

Symbols

Symbols are defined as both natural and anthropogenic arbitrary actions and physical creations that hold shared and negotiated values, beliefs, and meanings (Moore 1980; Tuan 1974). The symbols of interest are those found within the boundaries of the Elvis Presley birthplace and are a part of the pilgrims' cultural landscape. These symbols identify how people negotiate a sacred meaning to Elvis Presley through arbitrary items

and actions such as relics, souvenirs, music, statues, monuments, instruments, architecture, artifacts, clothing, food, and other objects.

The relics, which are objects or artifacts that have direct significance for the pilgrimage, must be shown to have a source of spiritual power and a connection to the sacred entity (Melczer 1993). Because relics cannot be moved from the sacred site, pilgrims are motivated to embark on a pilgrimage in order to come into contact with a relic. Relics have symbolic meaning, but not all symbols are relics. An example is a souvenir; it holds symbolic meaning but it is meant to be carried away from a sacred space. This process of pilgrimage is explained in the pilgrim's desire to physically touch the sacred in hopes of spiritual enlightenment. Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) stated that a symbolic interpretation is included within the sacredness that people give to certain places and that symbols at these places are an accumulation of similar experiences over time.

Different forms of music can promote different forms of identity through the symbolic meanings assigned to the music (Cohen 1995). The symbols within rock 'n' roll music, such as Elvis Presley's, emphasize a certain identity by containing certain meanings that the pilgrims understand (Feld 2001; Martin 1979). The symbolic nature of music is important to understand because it draws meaning from mythology. This relationship implies that in order to understand the symbols, one must understand the myths.

The social group within the culture of rock 'n' roll has created conceptual symbols in its music that carries meaning, which is highlighted in the music's use of symbolic imagery such as the sexual symbolism apparent in songs such as Elvis Presley's

“Hound Dog” and Jerry Lee Lewis’s “Great Balls of Fire” (Altschuler 2003). One example of how symbols work at musical pilgrimage sites in this form of symbolic imagery is John Lennon’s song “Imagine” that is played at his memorial Strawberry Fields (Kruse 2003). This song not only acts as a conceptual symbol for peace but also as a physical symbol at the site because of the placement of the word on his memorial, allowing the song to actually be visited by the pilgrims to this site.

Using Moore’s study of Walt Disney World as an example, the symbols of this particular pilgrimage site are made up of logos, structures, and costumes (Moore 1980). Disney uses the aesthetic value of the park to its advantage in the layout of how the buildings represent certain aspects of the mythology of the site. This sacred space was even explained as one entire symbol of a pilgrimage site because of its symbolic barrier in the ticket gate and central pilgrimage centre in the usage of the Magic Kingdom (Moore 1980).

The sacred space of the Appalachian Trail offers multiple symbols that are not anthropogenically constructed, but are a natural construct that has gained sacred validation because of the aesthetic beauty in the Appalachian Mountains and the mythology behind the mountain range. In a study using photo-elicitation techniques, hikers viewed the plants and the wildlife as symbols and as the most important aspects of their experience, followed by the scenic orientation of the landscape, the management, and deceptive behavior being last (Dorwart, Moore, and Leung 2010). The reasoning behind their decisions had to do with the meaning behind the objects considered as the symbols of this sacred site. The innocence and aesthetic value of the plants and wildlife

that were the symbols of the Appalachian Trail, brought joy and happiness, in comparison to the unusual objects and structures such as the caves and litter which brought about fear and negativity (Dorwart, Moore, and Leung 2010).

At the religious pilgrimage site of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City, the most important aspect affecting pilgrim behavior was actually not a part of the pilgrimage site. This aspect was the urban development taking place around the pilgrimage site, and this led to a negative response of the pilgrims in what they have explained as a loss in spirituality (Zamanian 2007). Here we see the surroundings of the sacred site having a negative impact on the symbols, implying that the surroundings of the symbols impact the perceptions of the pilgrims.

Also, in a study at the exclusively male sacred Christian shrine in Greece, Mount Athos, the symbolic characteristics of the space incorporated masculine themes into the landscape and activities, showing that gender definitely shaped the sacred space and its meaning (Andriotis 2009). The architecture, gems, artwork, icons, and manuscripts also act as relics with symbolic meaning of what this particular area was like in the Byzantine era. Some pilgrims state that these items are the reason for their journey. Also at this site, there is a large amount of symbolic material objects available to take home, which pilgrims consider a valuable way to show evidence of their activities. These objects were icons, incense, rosaries, and books (Andriotis 2009).

Experience

Experiences will be defined as what pilgrims understand of their time in sacred space, and this includes the emotions, desires, motivations, and activities and actions that involve one or more person (Kreiner 2010; Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood 2011; Turner 1969). Examples of the experiences consist of how pilgrims spent their time at Elvis Presley's birthplace, how they felt about their time at the location and the inspirations or ideas that were influenced by the site. In describing the pilgrimage experience, Turner (1969) argued that as people broke away from their normal social life, this became liminal behavior, and with all of these people together, they created "communitas." Liminal behavior, or liminality, is a transitional or in-between stage usually used to suggest a desire for enlightenment before moving from one metaphysical phase to the next. As people experiencing liminality came together for a common goal, their outsiderhood caused by their unstructured organization forms communitas. This process became a rite of passage for the pilgrim. Although Turner gave pilgrimage behavior a vocabulary for valid analysis, researchers are constantly finding diverse meanings and experiences in pilgrimage behavior (Turner 1969).

Doss (2008) explained that a prime example of experiences at Graceland takes place during the week of August 15. During this week, pilgrims partake in Elvis week, a week full of acknowledging Elvis through silent ceremonies, prayers, and candlelight vigils, bringing out a variety of emotions. These pilgrims experience the impact of Presley and realize that he was a real person. Some pilgrims leave things for Elvis and

others take parts of the place with them either in the form of a free part of the landscape such as a rock or plant trimming, or by buying a souvenir from the gift shop.

Interestingly, as local businesses participate in Elvis Week through joining and featuring their own Elvis associated activities, these places are becoming sacred too (Doss 2008).

In support of the idea of surrounding areas becoming sacred, Kruse (2003) explains that at Lennon's Strawberry Fields memorial, fans merge onto Central Park on December 8 to remember the life of Lennon on the anniversary of the day of his death. Using personal narrative, Kruse explains that as he approaches the building close to the memorial where Lennon was killed, conversation turns to silence. The song "Strawberry Fields" is replayed in his mind as he visits the site, feeling a close personal connection. The pilgrims to this site recalled how their life was shaped by Lennon's music, and in respect, they may even leave items such as guitar picks, note, roses, and candles. At Graceland and at Strawberry Fields, both studies suggest that the pilgrim's respect influences how the site is experienced (Kruse 2003).

In the battlefield tourism found at World War I's Somme and Ypres battlefields, the experience develops from a sense of culture memory and mythology. The area has been reported as a source of healing as it brings authenticity to past events that took place there. Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood (2011) found three motivations for visiting the site that also highlight a pilgrim's experience: for pilgrimage and remembrance, for validation, and because of the "battlefield-bug" (Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood 2011).

As a place of pilgrimage and remembrance, the Somme and Ypres battlefield served as a place to reflect. The site offered a source of pride for pilgrims' different

nationalities. Some pilgrims made multiple visits to the site, making it a form of ritual for some. The pilgrims felt a certain degree of obligation to visit the site and, while there, one pilgrim stated that his goal was to find the graves of all of his family members. Some pilgrims stated that their experience felt like a duty, traveling as a representative of their family to find lost loved ones or to pass knowledge on to the next generation. Others said that their experience gave them closure. The emotional responses from these remembrances were explained as sorrow and sadness, along with a “lump in the throat.” The impact of the emotions took the pilgrim’s mind to other ideas than just war in a source of nostalgia. This need for closure and the emotional responses felt by the pilgrims was characteristic of one who needs to return back to a normal social structure, as seen in Turner’s idea of rite of passage (Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood 2011).

In the validation of the battlefield, pilgrims said that the physical location was a place to think about death, killing, and WWI. The experience of validating the site caused the pilgrims to understand the magnitude and impact of WWI and to make the past events real. The pilgrims exhibited this behavior by taking pictures of certain aspects of the sacred space. The third motivation for visiting the battlefield was the “battlefield-bug.” In this, the visitors had a level of curiosity about the site, experiencing the meaning of the history. Interestingly, one pilgrim used the third person voice to indicate the meaning of grouped experience. These types of pilgrims longed to experience and validate past events, shown in their emotional experiences of nostalgia brought on by intense meanings of the site (Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood 2011).

In Andriotis's (2003) study of Mount Athos, the author broke the experiences of the pilgrims into five different elements, with the first being the spiritual element. This category explained that the pilgrims were able to experience the distance between themselves and an ordinary lifestyle. Pilgrims were also shown to visit the site on a frequent occasion for this feeling. Andriotis claimed that the truest pilgrims made an effort to stay away from secular activities and tourist notions in order to strengthen the spiritual element. Next, the cultural elements of this site were experienced in the symbols and myths of the history and art of the site. The atmosphere of the area, such as the monks in their traditional attire gave the pilgrims a unique experience, making the myths a reality. The secular elements of the site made up the next category, and these were experienced in the characteristics of the communal lifestyle. The pilgrims can stay in communal bunks and experience social activities and a community lifestyle. Adding to these social activities, the frequency of pilgrims taking photographs explains that for those who came for a spiritual experience, taking pictures was not a highly practiced activity. The environment was also categorized into a sacred element, providing a private experience. Some pilgrims enjoyed the walk and cited this as a major part of their experience and reason for coming to the site. The last element of traveling to the site was the educational element. The pilgrims within this element had a motivation of wanting some form of education and learning experience from their trip. This desired knowledge was experienced differently depending on the background of the pilgrim, whether it was a need for religious knowledge, life knowledge, or academic knowledge (Andriotis 2003).

Shared activities had a major affect on the experience at a Pennsylvanian Agricultural Fair in which the pilgrims traditionally return every year for a ten-day tenting experience (Kyle and Chick 2007). The greatest factor in the experience and perceptions of the tenting site were the shared activities of having a family tent site, followed by the spatial relationship to the broad fairground, and lastly the local community beyond the fairgrounds. Family members, past experiences, and group *communitas* provide shared experiences and also validate the claim that the social constructions were more effective at influencing a sense of place rather than physical qualities of the cultural landscape (Kyle and Chick 2007).

California's Mount Shasta is an example of a sacred space from the "New Age" revolution of thought in the twentieth century (Huntsinger and Gimenez 2000). This sacred space provided originally a sacred meaning to the members of the local indigenous religion, but recently, outsiders have started visiting the site. Both types of pilgrims acknowledged the same amount of values and awareness of the site, but the level of "sacredness" felt by each group was dependent upon sacred meaning derived from identity (Huntsinger and Gimenez 2000).

Using respondent photography to explain the most significant objects that affected experience on a certain section of the Appalachian Trail, the majority of sensing place engages the serenity of the plants and wildlife which bring happiness to the pilgrims (Dorwart, Moore, and Leung 2010). Negative perceptions come from unusual, mysterious, or out-of-place objects such as caves or trash. The landscape, park management, and effects of "deceptive behavior" were the most photographed objects

besides plants and wildlife, but the negative elements did not distract from the overall experience of the sacred space (Dorwart, Moore, and Leung 2010).

One interesting conclusion found from the study of battlefield pilgrims at Gettysburg National Military Park was the observation that Turner's liminal characteristic in rites of passage was only becoming a major characteristic of the pilgrims until they had made multiple visits (Gatewood and Cameron 2004), but all pilgrims explained that each time they came to the park, they were looking for a transcendental experience.

Methods

This qualitative study describes the manner in which sacred elements usually associated with sacred pilgrimages are used and experienced at the Elvis Presley birthplace in Tupelo, Mississippi. Specifically, this research explores how the secular tourists/pilgrims to the Elvis site perceive the experience as possessing sacred qualities. What meanings do secular pilgrims of Elvis Presley's birthplace give to the myths, symbols, and experiences of the site in order to make it sacred space? In order to answer this question, I have used semi-structured interviews at Elvis's birthplace to understand the prevalent themes that the visitors perceive at the birthplace. This method is best suited for this research because of the accessibility of pilgrims who can communicate their current understanding of Elvis's birthplace.

Visitor registry records were then used to create maps showing the spatial distribution of pilgrims who have visited the birthplace. This mapping component illustrates the spatial distribution of pilgrims to confirm that it is an international pilgrimage site. The mapping was performed after the interviews so that results from the interviews could help with interpreting the maps. It should be noted that a weakness to this study is that it was conducted during the visitor offseason. These methods were conducted in late February and early March, and although these methods allow for a suitable number of visitors to be interviewed and also for the visitor distribution of 2011 to be mapped, the highest number of visitors come during June through August.

Interview Sample

The sample size of this study was 11 visitors that were purposefully chosen due to their observable affective reactions to the Elvis Presley birthplace. The initial targeted sample was 10-15 visitors, and as interviews were conducted over two separate weekends, a maximum of 11 interviews were conducted and used in this study to increase its accuracy. The subjects displayed obvious visible reactions to the experience of visiting Elvis's birthplace. These behaviors included facial expressions or profound hand gestures. This targeted sampling approach was restricted to visitors of roughly thirty years of age or older to fulfill ethical requirements set forth by the institutional review board. Visitors were recruited to take part in the interview by verbal invitations. I explained my background, project, and importance of their participation before asking for their participation. Their names remain anonymous. In this approach, I engaged in conversation with the pilgrims in hopes that they may want to talk about their experience at the site.

Procedures

In the interviewing process, thirty-minute recorded interviews were conducted with the pilgrims/visitors. The "pilgrim" was considered one who has come to the site with the goal of experiencing Elvis Presley in a physical and mental way, possibly resulting in some kind of transformation and enlightenment. The interviews were conducted with the person in the family or group that was most excited about being at the site. In order to perform this research, I moderately participated in the "tour" at the Elvis

Presley birthplace. I took part in pilgrimage activities but also acted as an observer for participant observation.

The first step of this process was to approach the visitor at the site and make a formal introduction, explaining the research and why their help was needed. The person was then asked if he or she was interested in taking part in the study, explaining that their name would remain completely confidential. If the informant agreed to the interview, we moved to a secluded area and the interview began. The demographic variables used in the study were age, ethnicity, gender, education, home state or country, and number of times that they have visited the birthplace.

The interviews were recorded using an electronic voice recorder, allowing the recordings to be used for analysis. After conducting the interviews, the interviews were transcribed and then analyzed. In the analysis, a coding technique was used that highlighted the three sacred elements at the Elvis Presley birthplace, therefore reaching conclusions of how myths, symbols, and experiences at the site have affected each of the pilgrims' experiences.

Variables

For this study, a sacred element is defined as a conceptual or physical characteristic within a certain space that contributes to a site's sacred meaning. The three major sacred elements that are the focus of my research are myths, symbols, and experiences.

Myths

A myth is considered a part of the history or legend of Elvis Presley, being truth or fiction, and involving stories and folklore that communicates the widespread understanding of how Elvis Presley is understood to be sacred. Myths that relate to Elvis Presley are stories of his life, his music, movies, books, television shows concert footage, stories of concerts, and any other form of communicated system that has preserved the actions or included the reference of Presley. Questions that guided the interviews towards this topic were:

Why did you decide to come to the Elvis birthplace?

What are your memories of Elvis?

What does Elvis represent?

Why did you come here?

Have you been to Graceland?

How did you imagine this place to be?

What is your favorite song by Presley, and why?

The mythological elements are closely connected to the symbols of the site because the myths can help explain why certain symbols are used and how they are interpreted.

Symbols

Symbols are defined as both natural and anthropogenic arbitrary actions and physical creations that hold shared and negotiated values, beliefs, and meanings towards Elvis Presley. The studied symbols are from within the boundaries of the Elvis Presley

birthplace and are a part of the pilgrims' cultural landscape. These symbols help identify how people negotiate a sacred meaning to Elvis Presley through arbitrary items and actions such as souvenirs, music, statues, monuments, instruments, architecture, artifacts, clothing, food, and other appearances. Questions that guided my interviews towards this topic were:

What were the most significant parts of this site?

Did you come here to see any particular object?

What symbols can you think of in Elvis's life that this place represents?

Did any of his songs come to mind while you toured here?

Did you buy any souvenirs? Which one(s)?

What was your favorite part of this site?

Did you take any pictures, and if so, of what?

Symbols may parallel the myths of the site because of the prior knowledge that will be applicable from the pilgrims.

Experiences

Experiences are defined as what one understands of his or her participation or observation in a sacred space and will include the emotions, desires, motivations, and activities and actions that involve one or more person. Examples of experiences consist of how the pilgrims spent their time at Elvis's birthplace, how he or she felt about their time spent, and the inspirations or ideas that were influenced by the site. These experiences may also relate to Turner's rite of passage and *communitas* theory. The rites of passage at

the Elvis Presley birthplace will be defined as the authentic personal transformation process or transitional phase that the pilgrim comes to unconsciously feel through humbleness, momentary release of attachment to the outside world, unaffected by thoughts of his personal past or future, and an understanding that he is in the vicinity of a larger and more important force than himself. As a pilgrim takes part in this rite of passage, he enters a liminal stage of transition. If Turner is correct, the pilgrims share this liminal stage in order to create an unstructured social division of *communitas*. The experiences of the site are explored through examining the pilgrims' actions, personal thoughts, feelings, interpretations, conversations, walkways traveled at the site, and feelings towards other members. Questions that guided my interviews toward this topic are:

What emotions did you feel while visiting this site?

Did you feel like visiting this site was an obligation?

Does this feel like an ordinary trip?

Did you travel with a group?

In which order did you walk around the site?

Did you interact with any of the other visitors, and if so what did you talk about?

Has this site inspired you?

Did you experience a change in mood of the site at any particular place?

Instrumentation

In order to analyze the major sacred elements of myths, symbols, and experiences at the Elvis Presley birthplace, semi-structured interviews were used. I aimed my questions to elicit dialogue with the pilgrims that could reveal their beliefs and ideas about the sacred elements of a pilgrimage. A series of questions were first asked on demographic information that included age, ethnicity, gender, education, from where did they travel to the site, and number of times that they have visited. A second series of questions was then asked that included the questions listed above.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed into text for analysis. The purpose of my analysis was to code different parts of the interview that correlate to concepts of myths, symbols, and experiences. The analysis was completed with comparative coding that depicted the cultural themes in this particular social system. From the information gathered in the interviews, I created three separate categorical domains: myths, symbols, and experiences. Single ideas that appear in multiple domains were then used to create a collection of themes.

Finally, using visitor registry records for 2010 and 2011, maps were created showing the spatial distribution of visitors to the Elvis Presley birthplace. Two choropleth maps were created for 2010 – one map showing United States distribution and a separate map showing international distribution. For the map showing international distribution, the United States was not included in the sample. For 2011, both maps

showed international distribution. The difference in the two maps is that one map is a choropleth map, while the other is a cartogram that represents the number of visitors to the birthplace by illustrating a proportional surface area. As with the international map for 2010, the United States was not included in the sample.

Results

Sample

The selected sample of visitors at the Elvis Presley Birthplace for the interviews included 11 people – 6 males and 5 females. The spatial distribution included Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, California, and the Philippines. All were Caucasian and between the ages of 30-75. Table 1 shows the name of the visitors, where they are from, age, education, and times visited.

NAME	FROM LOCATION	AGE	EDUCATION	TIMES VISITED
John	Mississippi	35	College	4
Jill	Mississippi	40	College	0
Paul	Texas	56	College	0
Cindy	Texas	43	College	0
Luke	California	35	High School	2
Peter	Mississippi	58	College	5-10
Beth	Philippines	33	College	0
Debra	Mississippi	75	High School	0
James	Mississippi	37	College	0
George	Alabama	63	Technical School	0
Lucy	Alabama	55	College	0

Table 1: List of Visitors Interviewed

The interviews were conducted over two separate weekends at the end of February and beginning of March 2012. Based on the previous literature and the research methodology, the questions of the interviews were grouped into three separate categories – questions about myths, symbols, and experience. The following results will be presented in this same format, referring to the visitors’ replies within each category. The only exception is for the section for myths, which first explains the answers provided by each visitor when asked: “Why did you come to the birthplace?”

Myths

Reason for Coming

Perhaps the most basic question asked was why the visitors came to the site. The most popular answer came from visitors Jill, Luke, Peter, George, and Lucy. They all replied that they were passing through and decided to stop. John said that his group came because he was with a friend who had family in town and they looking for something to do. “Just getting to know the history of where Elvis was born and where he lived and where he came from,” said John. Paul said that he came because he had relatives who were visiting, and they decided to visit the birthplace because they had already been to Graceland before. Luke said that he was visiting the area but had stopped to take pictures for a band of his. “One of my band members has helped with construction in the area. It’s his construction company so he’s showing me what he’s working on.”

Beth, the only international visitor interviewed said that she had come with friends who wanted to visit the site. Debra brought her grandson to the birthplace as his

Christmas present because of his interest in Elvis. James was perhaps the most enthusiastic visitor to the site. He was from Mississippi and had decided to come to the birthplace because he had already been to Graceland. "I just wanted to come because I've already been to Graceland, and what better to do than go to the Birthplace," said James.

Questions about Myths

John recounted the different media of Elvis's work, which leads him into discussing his performances. "I remember from what I have seen on movies and videocassettes and things like that. Just his showmanship. Just innate ability to get people's attention and get them excited..." When asked what Elvis represents, John replies, "If I had to say, I would say the American dream because he grew up in a little house and became a multi-million dollar star. He went from nothing to riches..." John also stated that he had been to Graceland twice before, and had been to the birthplace four times.

Jill also explained how she enjoyed his dancing and movies. "And I remember that about him on TV, you know, watching him. I would say he represents the music. People want to be him. People follow him. He was the first American Idol." When asked about Graceland, Jill explains that she has been around eight times because her family would spend a lot of time in Memphis. When asked about how she imagined the birthplace would be, she said, "I didn't know. I had just seen a picture of a little house, so I had just imagined a little house. I didn't know there was a church or a museum, so I had just thought there was a little house sitting there. I just came to see all of it, to see what all Elvis was about." Her favorite song by Elvis was "Hound Dog."

Paul from Dallas, Texas, compared Elvis to John F. Kennedy. “We have JFK in Dallas, and everyone comes to see where he was assassinated. We’re just used to it. You just take it for granted.” Although Paul enjoys Elvis, Paul remembers not being a huge fan.

I really don’t have that much of a memory [of Elvis]. My parents were older and they weren’t that much into the rock n’ roll scene so they weren’t that much in to it. A lot of people in my generation, women especially were in to it. I remember watching a Hawaiian concert on TV one time and I just kind of new of him, I knew he was in Las Vegas, but I don’t have much of a memory of him. I think he was a good entertainer and I think he did start a new movement in music and made it more acceptable for some of the black gospel and stuff that came into the songs.

Paul had never been to Graceland but considered that “it would be neat to go.” Paul claimed that the music by Elvis that he enjoyed was “just like the old movie ones.” “I really like ‘Ain’t nothin’ but a Hound Dog,’” said Paul.

When asked about how he imagined the birthplace to be before arriving, Paul referred to how the birthplace was supposedly moved into the area from a different location. “I guess I imagined it to be already in the same location. I didn’t expect that they had moved it, but that was just a silly expectation of myself.” The location of the birthplace is actually still in the original location and has not been moved. After asking the director of the birthplace about the myth of having the birthplace moved, he said that

people assume that because the name of the street has been renamed and the landscape has changed drastically since Elvis lived there.

Cindy was also from Texas but was much more enthusiastic about Elvis. She recalled her childhood experiences with his music.

I remember when I was 11 or 12, my mom gave me a record player and she gave me some albums that went with that, and a couple were Elvis albums. I listened to them. You know, we didn't have cable and the internet so you listened to what you had, you know. You had the radio, you had what records whoever gave you, whether it was your parents or you bought or whatever. And so I think some of that came from just having a handful of albums to listen to and two of them were Elvis albums so you just begin to like what you listen to all the time.

Cindy was then asked what particular songs or style she preferred. "I liked a lot of his later music," she replied. "I liked a lot of his gospel. I kind of liked all of them. I listen to a lot of contemporary Christian music, but I like old gospel as well." After discussing growing up in a house that listened to Elvis, Cindy told about going to an Elvis concert.

When I was 13, my sister who was six years older than me took me to a concert where Elvis was playing. I believe he was playing in Fort Worth. When I was 16, I went back to one of his last concerts because that was in '76 and he died in '77. I snuck a cassette recorder in there and taped the entire concert on a cassette, and I found it a year or so ago, and the sound was really good believe it or not. That was a fond memory.

Cindy said that “Elvis represents just an entertainer.” In the context of a secular pilgrimage setting, the question of asking what Elvis represents to Cindy made her quickly add details of a religious background. “I’m very strong in my faith and I don’t idolize anyone on this earth. I enjoy his music, but he’ll never be more than just an entertainer to me who made nice music.” Cindy then discussed his death. “I think it’s sad that he died at an early age. I just put him in the same, but different, as Michael Jackson. He still had a lot of entertaining years left. He could have touched a lot more lives with his music, and sadly enough, he died early.” Cindy had been to Graceland, and when asked how she imagined the birthplace to be, she said, “The house is about what I had imagined him to grow up in.”

When Luke was asked what he remembers about Elvis, he said that all he could remember was the day that Elvis died. “It really hit me when I went to Graceland and I saw all those records from the floor to the ceiling. He was the first for rock n’ roll. He was the first to combine it all.” Peter had similar thoughts on Elvis, except he had a much more personal connection to him since he was also from Tupelo.

I actually went to the same school that he went to. And then, I actually had some of the same teachers who taught him, of course I’m a lot younger than him, and he had already left Tupelo before I came along. They used to tell us tales of how he used to come back and visit sometimes. He still had relatives and friends, and many times he wouldn’t come as Elvis the star, he would come without people knowing who he was.

Peter then began talking about his musical influences as he was growing up. “When I grew up, I was a big fan of the Beatles, but there wouldn’t been a Beatles without Elvis. He reached a lot of genres. He had a good voice. I grew up hearing about him. I had an aunt who went to see him when he came back to Tupelo after he got famous.” From the popularity of Elvis within Tupelo, Peter claims that Elvis became like a member of the family.

Everybody was talking about him. It was so much, my thing is that he was like a family member. Like somebody from the family. I didn’t think about how famous he was really. It was like a household word. I didn’t see that he was so famous. It wasn’t such a big deal. I walked the same streets going to school that he did. It was home to us.

Peter was asked about the relevance and perception of the house within Tupelo. “I can relate. And what we grew up in was a lot like what he grew up in,” said Peter.

Beth said that Elvis was very popular in her home country of the Philippines. “Everybody knows him. I heard him for the first time in the early 90s.” She was asked about her memories of Elvis growing up. “Before I came here, I knew about him. I knew that he was very, very famous. Even my husband, he would tell me stories. He was very rock n’ roll.” She has not been to Graceland.

Debra recounted stories of her daughter listening to Elvis when she was younger and told about going to Memphis. “We had a daughter, and she loved Elvis, and we’ve also been to his place in Memphis several times. I did sometimes listen to him, but not really. I was into country music. I liked Graceland. I was not really impressed, but I did

enjoy it.” She said Elvis is more of a singer than anything else. Before she came, she “had no idea what to expect.” Her favorite songs by Elvis are “Love Me Tender” and “Blue Christmas.”

George had a personal encounter with Elvis that made him remember the full story when he was asked about his thoughts on Elvis.

When I was in Memphis back when Elvis was still alive, I was taking a friend of mine to the airport and I made a wrong turn, and we drove past this house and I said, ‘What is that?’ On the way back through, he had these two gates that open up and they have musical notes on them and I recognized that. That was his living in there. I seen him in there one night, he was going to an airport, had one of these good looking blond chicks in the car. It was like a Ferrari or something, but he was driving. I was in the Navy in Memphis. This was around ’75. He was on the way to the airport, but he actually stopped and talked to us. He was real nice, I was surprised he stopped.

George also remembered going to Graceland with his wife when Elvis was still alive.

We pulled up to Graceland and they had this security guy sitting there and he was a pretty old dude, and he had platinum blonde Elvised-up hair. His hair was not moving. We got to talking to him and he put us on a golf cart and we went up there. It was quite a place there. And Elvis was home that day, so we weren’t able to get off the golf cart. It wasn’t a tour like it is now.

It was George’s first time to visit the Birthplace. He was accompanied by his wife. “A lot of people don’t think about coming to his birth house,” said George. “I noticed they were

putting a theatre up back there, so I suppose they're making some money somehow." He was then asked how he imagined the site before coming. "I didn't figure that it would be like Graceland. We figured that it would probably just be a house. It's really more than I thought it would be." George then explained the cultural influence of Elvis.

He definitely left an impact on the society. He joined the army and went to Korea, and that's where he got his drugs, or that's the story. But he had his own unique style. He left a lasting impression. Here we stand talking to you about it. I've been to a lot of Elvis museums. They have them in Nashville, TN. I've seen a lot of clothes and cars of his, but so far his, I don't know. His house is pretty cool.

For Lucy, it was her first time to the birthplace. "We were just driving this way and we decided to stop," she said. "I figured it would just be a spot in the road." To her, Elvis was just an entertainer. "He was a showman. He was good looking, or he was in the 60s. I love Elvis music. I grew up with it." Her favorite song was 'Stuck on You' because that was her grandson's favorite. "He sings it all the time."

Symbols

When asked about the symbols within the Elvis Presley birthplace, the interviewees gave a range of responses. Beginning with John, he said that his love for guitars is what made the guitars an important part of the area for him. "I'm a real musical person. I can't play any instruments per se, but I've always had this mystique about acoustic guitars and their sound and how pure of an instrument they are," said John. He then said that the place made him think of the song "Heartbreak Hotel," although he said

that he knew the majority of Elvis's songs, "[the birthplace] hadn't brought up much imagery." John said that he took pictures of the microphones, inside of the house, and of the house.

For Jill, the house was the most important part of the birthplace. "Just being able to study it..." she said. She was then asked about what she talked about while she was at the birthplace. "We talked about the platinum records that he had made and the jukebox that was in the Museum. It was a neat piece of history." The platinum records also made its way into her photos. "I took some pictures of the platinum albums, the jukebox, and the clothes. Just some stuff that represented him and was on him." As far as souvenirs, "we bought postcards, pencils, and magazines. My family also bought some mugs and a fan."

When Paul was asked about "the best part," he said he liked the museum, but he added that he had a strong interest in the house as well. "I'm not really a big Elvis backer like my wife, but I like seeing the type of houses where people were struggling back in the 30s, and so, it was nice to see a small two bedroom house. We took a picture of my family on the front porch so that they can brag to people who didn't come." Paul also had an interest in Elvis's religious upbringing.

I liked seeing the house where he was born and I kind of liked, I wasn't aware, I knew he had a religious background but I didn't know specifics, so the presentation in the church allowed me to realize that he was Pentecostal, and that was interesting to me. I don't know, just to get a general feeling of where his religious background came from.



Figure 2: Assembly of God Church at Elvis Presley birthplace

Cindy explained that she bought a hand-fan for her mom. “She sits outside and likes hand fans and they’re hard to find now. And then, we collect things that we do throughout the year. If we see a Christmas ornament of a place that we’ve been to, we get it and it helps us remember that we have been to that year.” Apart from what Cindy bought at the birthplace, she also had a strong idea of what word represented the birthplace.

I think if one word could define from that house to what he ended up with would be success. Monetary success... fame and fortune. It’s amazing to know how Graceland, since it has been there, our homes are just bigger, bigger, and bigger. Graceland just doesn’t look that big anymore. The house that I grew up in was

nowhere near the size of Graceland, but now, homes seem to be bigger and fancier.

For Luke, Peter, Beth, and Debra, the house was the most significant, although Luke did add that he did personally like the old antique Plymouth car parked outside the birthplace. He said that he did take more pictures of the car, even though his original reason for being at the birthplace was to take pictures for a band he was a part of in California. For Peter, he said that he did not buy anything on that day he visited, but on previous trips to the birthplace, he has bought postcards and a cup. He said that he had taken pictures of the house in “several different ways.” For Beth, who was from the Philippines, she said that she did not buy any souvenirs. And although Debra also said that the house was the most significant, she also enjoyed the chapel and the Jukebox. “It just reminded me of old times,” she said referring to the Jukebox. She also took pictures of the chapel and in front of Elvis’s house.

When asking James to describe words that represent the birthplace, he said, “The one word that comes to mind to represent this whole place is “blessed.” When Elvis was born, his parents, he had to live with very little money and no luxuries what so ever. He was just blessed with a great singing talent and acting abilities, which progressed as he got older.” His idea of the song that represented the birthplace was interesting. “I thought of ‘In the Ghetto,’” he said. “Some people think of a Ghetto and think of poor, and that’s how Elvis was. He was poor and not a lot to go with but he still made it through and he was happy with every moment.” While he had similar ideas to the significant parts of the house as the other visitors, his reasoning was much more descriptive. “To me, the most

significant parts were the house and the church because those were the places that Elvis had been in,” said James. “To experience where Elvis had been is an overwhelming experience. Bed and the house were the most significant objects because that’s where Elvis was born. He was born in the bed. And that was the very beginning.” He also took many photographs. “I took pictures of the church because its religious and it’s a small church, and Elvis had faith which helped him get through many of the hard times in his career, and it doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you have faith in something.” While he was there, he bought two lunch boxes, a coffee mug, a movie, and a CD.

When George was asked about the significant parts of the birthplace, he turned and jokingly said, “Is that his outhouse?! I’ll have to check that out!” He was then asked about a song that represented the area. Like James, he also said “In the Ghetto.” “I was born outside of Detroit, Michigan, in a rough neighborhood,” he explained. “But it seems like the song related to the cultural event of living in a neighborhood like that. It appeals. Some of that stuff is goofy, but you have to take the good with the bad. Like the movie music.” He did not buy any souvenirs, but he “considered buying [his] daughter’s boyfriend a shot glass.” Lastly, when I asked him about any photographs that he may have taken, he humorously said, “We didn’t take any pictures. We got memories, man.”

Experience

John did not feel like his trip was an obligation. “It didn’t feel like an ordinary trip though, something different to do,” he said. “I like historical sites, and it’s good to see something like this being taken care of. I’m glad people care about the history. I like to

see it preserved. I have been to a few civil war sites and they can be either bare boned or lavish and this is done pretty well. This captures the essence of who he was and where he came from and where he's going now." John said that he toured the birthplace by first going to the museum, then the souvenir shop, and then the house. He did not feel annoyed by any of the other visitors and he did not talk to them. He said that his family talked about merchandising and marketing while they walked around the site. Jill said that her emotions were "happy emotions because I have finally got to see it," referring to the birthplace. "But also sadness because I remembered his birthday." She also felt like the trip was not an obligation. When asked how the site has inspired her, Jill said, "Well I'm learning how to play guitar, so reading about him learning to play has inspired me to keep learning." Like Jill, Paul said that the trip did not feel like an obligation.

I thought it was nice and I thought the lady inside the church did a really good job and she was into it. I wouldn't have wanted to make a special trip just for this, or I may have been let down. I think it was just something along the way. It was nothing that we had planned to do. My family had just put in on the agenda for visiting this town. I guess it's good to see where one started. The place where you first start out is little for all of us, but that's not really how you define yourself to be. But I guess if you are a big Elvis fan, you want all that you can get, so I guess that is just a link in the chain that they want to see.

Cindy said that her experience at the birthplace "brings back happy memories of being at those concerts, making those cassettes," She said that she would not have come

from Texas just to the birthplace, and that she might come back if she could bring her sister. She was also not annoyed by the other visitors. "It's kind of fun to watch other people with such a passion get to be here. I appreciate the other people here; watch them take a lot of pictures." Cindy also added that she appreciated that the birthplace had relatives of Elvis working there.

Beth said that she had not talked to anybody other than who was in her group. "It's nice to be here," she said. "It's a very interesting place, being here in all of Mississippi." For Debra, the weather played a major role in her experience. "It's very peaceful," said Debra. "It's just a good day for us to be out as a family and enjoy ourselves." She toured the house first, and then walked to the chapel, and then the church, and finally the museum. She said that she talked to other visitors from Texas and Canada, but they did not talk about Elvis. The man from Canada wanted Debra to use his camera to take his picture. While there, she said Elvis was the only thing she was thinking about. "I was just thinking about how it used to be, how he would sing, and how he was brought up."

"I felt a combination of happy, and I did feel a bit of sadness, but I was mostly happy because this where Elvis had been in his early Childhood," said James. "But this is where he has been, and that just felt awesome." James said that after seeing Graceland, he has wanted to see the birthplace for a while. He first toured the house, then the church, and then the chapel. "I didn't talk to anybody else, just too much happiness." James also explained that the birthplace has inspired him to "keep going." "This place has inspired me to keep on going because right now, I'm kind of in the same way Elvis was, because

bad finances, but just seeing this and knowing what Elvis had to go through makes me want to keep going, because just to keep going makes me think that there will be something great in the future.”

George said that traveling to the birthplace was not an obligation. “It wasn’t on my bucket list, we were just interested in what it had,” he said. When George was asked about the emotions that the birthplace presents, he made an interesting comparison to Graceland.

There is a definite emotion, but I don’t think it necessarily comes from the bricks and mortar and roofing. I don’t want to use the word “Hallowed Ground,” even though you would probably like that. But everyone comes from somewhere. It’s what you make out of life. This is definitely one end and Graceland is the other. It’s just this humble beginning, and what it all blew up to. It started out there in that house. And it all just adds up.

Mapping

The mapping component of this project illustrates the spatial distribution of pilgrims to confirm that it is an international pilgrimage site. Using the 2010 visitor registry of the Elvis birthplace and a list of international visitors already compiled for Mississippi tourism statistics in 2011, a series of maps were compiled to understand visitor distribution patterns in 2010 and 2011. For 2010, a choropleth map of the United States and international distribution was created, although January, February, and March visitor registry documents had been lost at the birthplace and were not included in the

sample. Due to the large amount of data in visitor registry files for 2010, a sample of every tenth visitor was collected. Table 2 shows the sample collected for the United States in March through December of 2010.

Mississippi	309	Nebraska	24
Alabama	283	Washington	23
Florida	180	Kansas	21
Georgia	178	Maryland	18
Tennessee	147	Massachusetts	18
Texas	137	Connecticut	15
California	97	New Jersey	14
Louisiana	92	Oregon	11
South Carolina	85	Nevada	10
North Carolina	84	Maine	8
Missouri	78	New Mexico	8
Oklahoma	70	West Virginia	8
Arkansas	66	Alaska	6
Illinois	60	South Dakota	6
Ohio	60	Montana	5
Minnesota	56	North Dakota	5
Wisconsin	53	Rhode Island	5
Michigan	50	Hawaii	4
Indiana	47	Idaho	4
Iowa	44	New Hampshire	4
New York	41	Delaware	3
Kentucky	39	Utah	3
Pennsylvania	32	Wyoming	2
Colorado	30	District of Columbia	1
Virginia	25	Vermont	1
Arizona	24		

Table 2: United States visitor sample in 2010 (March - December)

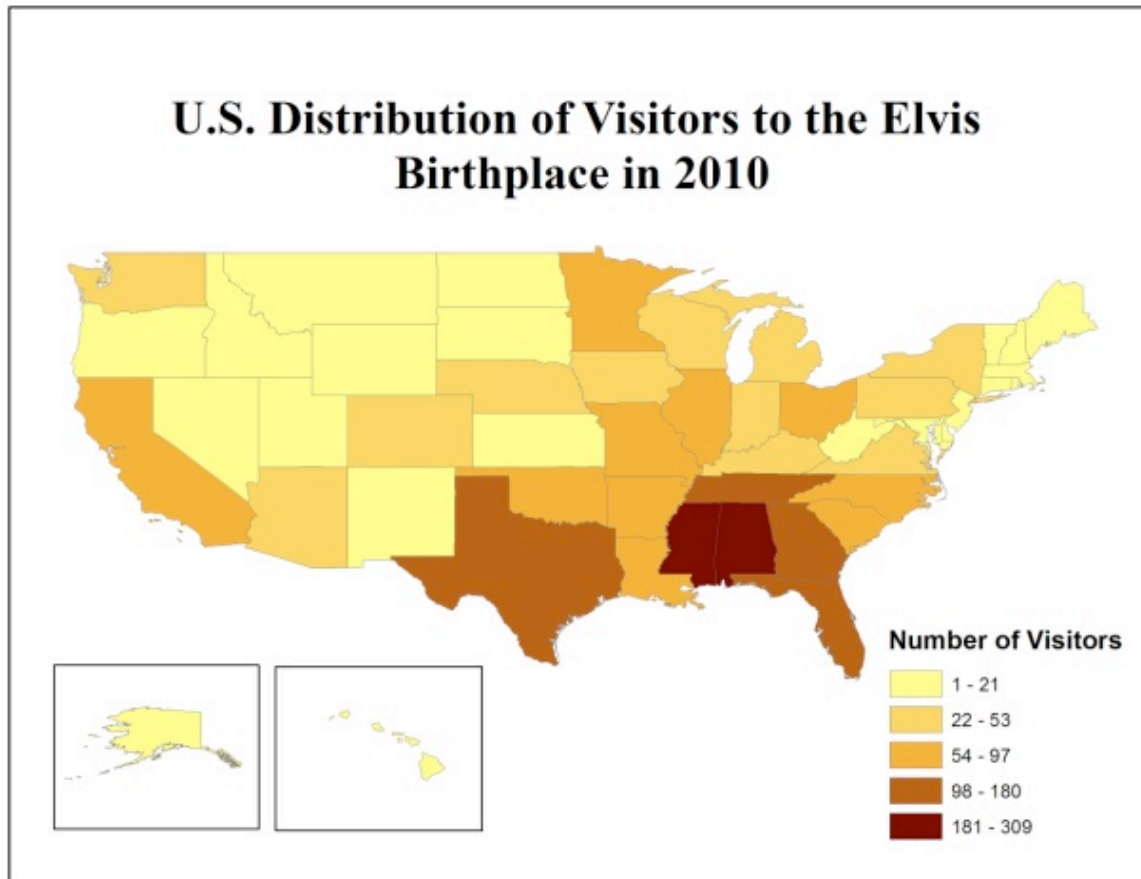


Figure 3: U. S. Distribution of Visitors to the Elvis Birthplace in 2010

Figure 3 shows a map for the visitor sample in Table 2. Most of the visitors to the birthplace came from Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee, respectively. Table 3 shows the international visitor sample from March through December of 2010.

UNITED KINGDOM	298	ICELAND	4
CANADA	156	SPAIN	3
AUSTRALIA	50	THAILAND	3
IRELAND	48	SOUTH AFRICA	3
VENEZUELA	35	PUERTO RICO	3
GERMANY	34	AUSTRIA	2
NETHERLANDS	33	ISRAEL	2
NORWAY	20	POLAND	2
JAPAN	19	NEW ZEALAND	2
SWEDEN	15	CZECH REPUBLIC	1
BRAZIL	12	RUSSIAN FEDERATION	1
FRANCE	11	INDIA	1
ITALY	11	ARGENTINA	1
BELGIUM	8	HONDURAS	1
FINLAND	6	CROATIA	1
PHILIPPINES	6	KOREA, REPUBLIC OF	1
DENMARK	6	BERMUDA	1
CHINA	5	MONACO	1
SWITZERLAND	5		

Table 3: International visitor sample in 2010 (March - December)

Figure 4 shows a map of the data from table 3 in order to illustrate the international distribution of visitors to the birthplace in 2010. The sample concluded that the countries with the largest number of pilgrims came from the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and Venezuela, respectively.

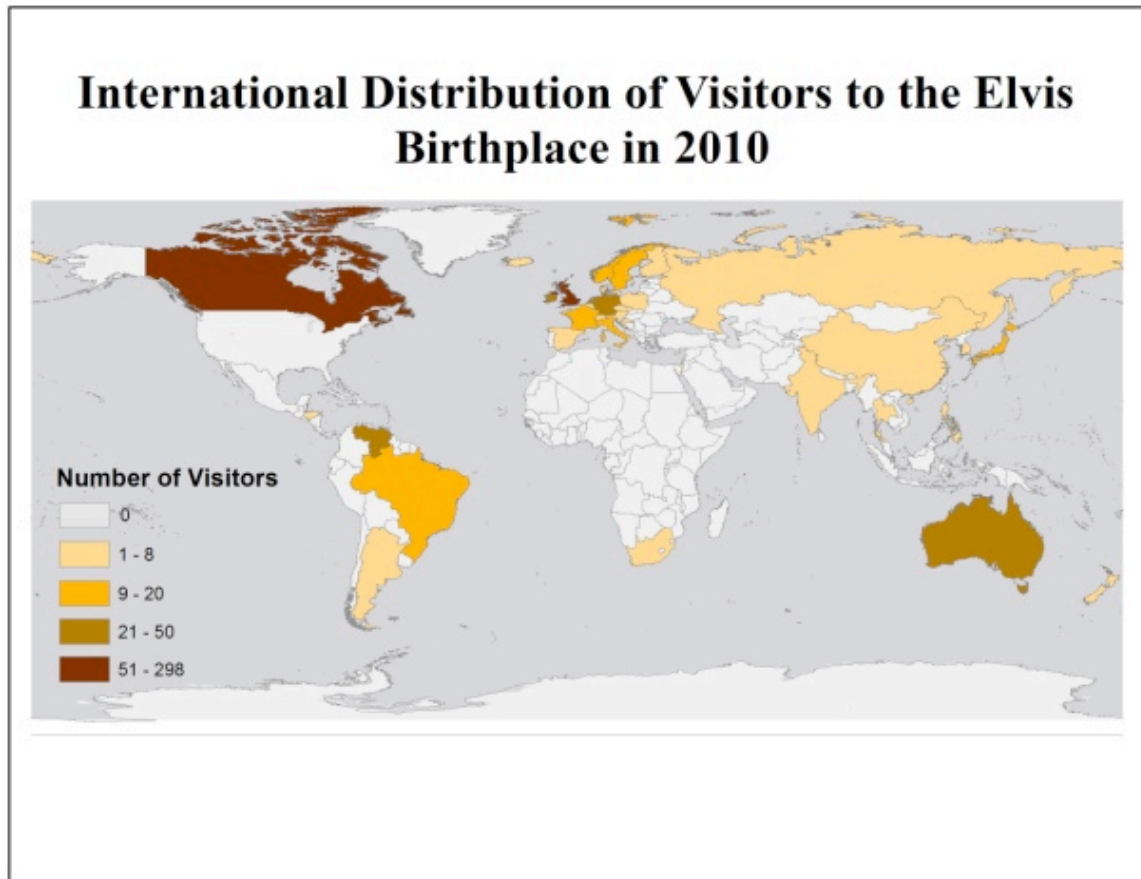


Figure 4: International Distribution of Visitors to the Elvis Birthplace in 2010

Since the data from 2010 was sampled, complete international data for 2011 was retrieved in order to show an accurate international distribution of visitors to the birthplace. This data comes from a count taken of the visitor registry by the staff of the Elvis birthplace. Table 4 shows the number of international visitors reported.

UNITED KINGDOM	7357	VENEZUELA	6
CANADA	1400	TURKEY	5
AUSTRALIA	477	COLOMBIA	5
GERMANY	465	PARAGUAY	4
NETHERLANDS	354	URUGUAY	4
SWEDEN	323	ICELAND	4
IRELAND	293	RUSSIAN FEDERATION	4
NORWAY	261	ARGENTINA	4
JAPAN	120	CHINA	4
BELGIUM	96	SLOVENIA	3
SWITZERLAND	92	PERU	3
FRANCE	92	INDONESIA	3
SPAIN	87	GUATEMALA	2
BRAZIL	85	SLOVAKIA	2
ITALY	72	ISRAEL	2
DENMARK	52	CHILE	2
AUSTRIA	41	TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO	2
FINLAND	39	MALAYSIA	2
MEXICO	32	GREECE	2
PUERTO RICO	22	INDIA	2
THAILAND	19	ECUADOR	2
NEW ZEALAND	17	NIGERIA	2
CROATIA	10	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC	
SOUTH AFRICA	7	REPUBLIC	1
PHILIPPINES	6	BELIZE	1
POLAND	6	KOREA, REPUBLIC OF	1

Table 4: International visitors in 2011

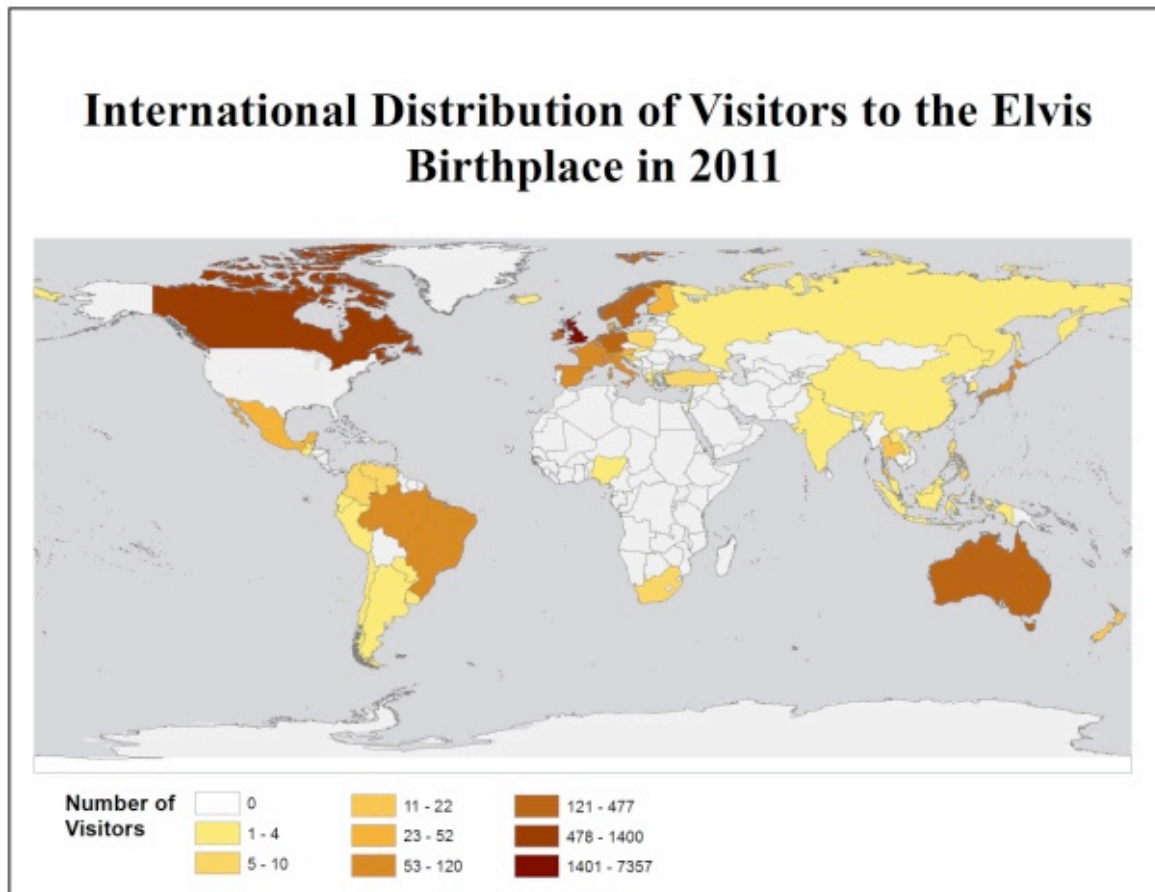


Figure 5: International Distribution of Visitors to the Elvis Birthplace in 2011

Figure 5 shows a map of the data from Table 4 in order to illustrate the international distribution of visitors to the Elvis birthplace in 2011. The largest contributor of international visitors to the birthplace came from the United Kingdom at 7357 visitors, followed by Canada (1400), Australia (477), Germany (465), and Netherlands (354). Due to the issue that the majority of the countries have single digit numbers, the choropleth mapping technique may not be sufficient. In order to illustrate

the countries with the largest contribution of visitors to the site, a cartogram of the data was created, as shown in Figure 6.

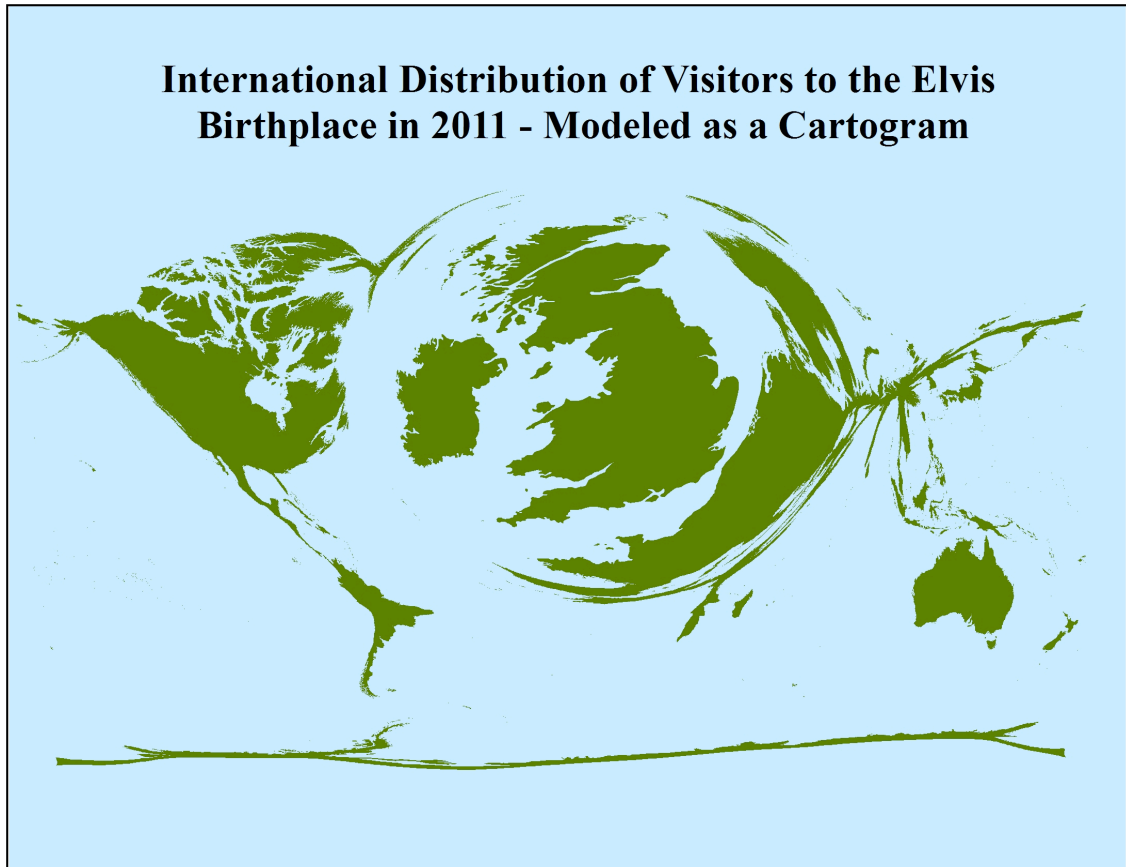


Figure 6: Cartogram of international distribution of visitors in 2011

The cartogram displays each country in proportion to the number of visitors that have visited the site. Therefore, the map shows that the largest number of visitors comes from the United Kingdom by displaying the United Kingdom as the largest country of the map. Canada is then second in size, followed by Western Europe and then Australia.

Discussion

It has already been established that the Elvis Presley birthplace is a place of secular pilgrimage. People are coming to the site because Elvis was born there. The maps also show that there is an international distribution of pilgrims that come to the site. But what are the elements that qualify the sacred space as a religious pilgrimage? As a model of simplification, this study uses the three elements of myths, symbols, and experiences in order to group themes that are appearing at the site.

Myths

The interviews prove that the birthplace of Elvis Presley correlates with Doss's (2008) study of Graceland in that all related groups of people that interact with the Elvis Presley birthplace contribute to the mythological element. Just as the people had a wide variety of memories, beliefs, and interests in Elvis, they also had many different reasons for coming. Most of the interviewed visitors came to the site because they were passing through the area. Almost all of the visitors were with family and/or friends. A few visitors explained that their reason for coming was to have "something to do." Others suggested that it was an activity tied with visiting Graceland in order to complete the "start of something." The site being a "convenient stop" reflects what Gatewood and Cameron (2004) found at Gettysburg National Park.

More specific reasons for visiting the site included taking pictures for a band and taking someone to the birthplace as a Christmas present. Taking pictures for a rock n' roll band shows that there is a strong musical connection to Elvis's birthplace, and a

desire to be identified within the space of a legend. The act of taking someone to the birthplace as a Christmas present shows that there is an expectation of value and worth in the experience of the being at the birthplace.

Many of the visitors said that Elvis was a “showman,” a singer, and a representation of a “new movement” in music. To most, he had been represented through his music. One visitor summarized the consensus of the views surrounding Elvis when she said that he was an entertainer and not a deity. Some of the visitors said that the story of Elvis had been told as an “American dream” or as a “rags to riches” story. One visitor said specifically that Elvis had left a definite impact on society. The pilgrims to the Elvis Presley Birthplace have identified Elvis through three of the similar categories referenced by Alderman’s (2008) study of the writings on the wall of Graceland. The interviews support the three categories of Elvis representing “the American dream,” “Sex and Romance,” and “Family.”

To the locals of the area, one visitor explained that Elvis was seen as a friendly guy and a “member of the family.” He was remembered as a “star” that would return home and still visit with friends, family, and old girlfriends. As shown by Graml (2005), pilgrims and locals can have differing views that contribute to the mythology of the site, but in this case at the Elvis Presley birthplace, the locals’ positive portrayal of Elvis is contributing to the pilgrimage landscape.

The many different mediums of Elvis’s work were shown to have built the mythology of him. Not only was his music mentioned but many of the visitors suggested that his movies, television appearances, and the iconic imagery of his dancing had built

their ideas of Elvis. Other key words that appeared throughout the textual analysis of the responses of the visitors explained themes of rock n' roll music, "good looks," female desire, and Las Vegas. Specifically in his music, many of the visitors responded with different genres of Elvis's music. Some favored his gospel music, although others favored his country and rock n' roll.

Most of the visitors said that they had only imagined the site to be a little house and that they had not expected a museum and a church house. All of the visitors said that the area offered much more than they had originally expected. The site was said to be similar with other sacred sites, such as the John F. Kennedy assassination site in Dallas, Texas, but in the context that the visitor was from Dallas and that he had taken the site for granted and does not find the excitement of the area due to being in close range to the site. This suggests that one part of the mythology of the site has been built on the idea of spatial range to the site.

Graceland was represented as a major component to the mythology of the birthplace. One visitor remembered Memphis as the area where he had met Elvis. He described Elvis as nice, but also characterized him as having a "blonde chick" and a "Ferrari or some nice car." He also described Elvis as being welcoming because of allowing people to visit Graceland. The same visitor offered the idea of what I would describe as a possible "grey area" in the myths surrounding Elvis. This grey area is made up of personal traits of Elvis that seems to not be a preferred discussion topic. Examples include Elvis's time in the army and his drug use. Although both of these examples have been extensively documented and are factual information, the description of this as a

“grey area” illustrates that the ideas are myths that one visitor quickly mentioned in combination by saying Elvis got on drugs when he was in Korea, “or that’s the story.”

One interesting aspect of the mythology of the site is that a false myth had been created about the original location of the house. Several of the responses suggested that the house had lost a certain amount of sacredness because the house had supposedly been moved from its original location. This was not the case. The house was in fact still in its original location. The exact reason for this false myth is not completely clear, although there is a possible explanation. After asking one of the ladies who worked inside the home about the myth, she replied with, “There’s a lot of things about Elvis that people are gonna say that are wrong.” Her reason for the misunderstanding was that the name of the road had been changed from Old Saltillo Rd. to Elvis Presley Blvd. Along with the change of the landscape, there was confusion in where the house was located. Furthermore, the old Pentecostal Church that Elvis first went to church in had been moved to the area. It is possible that between the renaming of the road, bringing in the church, and the change of the landscape represented in photos within the museum has caused the false mythology of the movement of the house.

Symbols

Many different musical items at the birthplace were thought of as symbolic of Elvis, although these and other non-musical items also conjure images of the different aspects of the mythology surrounding Elvis. One visitor said that the most important items were those that were “on him.” This suggests that it is the physical contact that

Elvis has made with the objects which makes them sacred symbols. The definitive items that are classified as relics appear in this conversation. The items such as the bed in the house, the clothing on display in the museum, the guitars, and the house are the items that cannot be moved and came into contact with Elvis, or are perceived to have come into contact with him. It is this perception that is developed due to the historical significance that develop what a relic is to the pilgrims. This historical significance has been buffered in how the birthplace develops a mood with surrounding objects such as the old Plymouth car and jukebox.

One visitor explaining his fascination with the old car suggests that the birthplace is more than just a remembrance of Elvis – it is a place of historical significance that attempts to be symbolic of the time in which Elvis spent his childhood. Speaking with the director of the birthplace about the birthplace portraying a specific mood, he explained that one major goal of the birthplace is to strive for historical significance and represent the early years of Elvis's life. Not only is this embraced by the home but the renovation of the old Pentecostal church house is an attempt to present the scene of the past to the pilgrims of the site. With this, the area attempts to combine the influential aspects of Elvis's early life that led to his career.

Many of the visitors could be said to have music on the mind. Through the interviews, the birthplace was shown as a symbol of music in general. As shown by similar responses, the jukebox was a memorable item that caught the attention of the visitors at the birthplace. Although most of the visitors did not think of any specific song as they toured the birthplace, "In the Ghetto" was mentioned by two different visitors.

The attachment of this song to this area shows that there is an illustration of place presented to the visitors through the musical mythology of Elvis.

Many of the visitors tied themes of struggle to the house. Most of the pictures taken at the birthplace were of the house, and one visitor said that he took a picture of someone next to the house “just so he could say he had been there.” Interestingly, the house also represented success to some of the visitors who had visited Graceland and were thinking more towards Elvis’s successful life of fame and fortune. One visitor said that the site represents Elvis as being “blessed,” which relates to the strong religious themes of the area.

The usual souvenirs purchased by the visitors were small items that could be put to use, such as a coffee mug, a hand fan, pencils, and a lunchbox. The different media of Elvis’s work – movies and albums mainly – were also reflected in the souvenirs.

Overall, the major themes of success, economy, and struggle have surfaced as symbolic descriptions of the birthplace. The site’s significance comes from the fact that Elvis was born in the house. Therefore, the legend, the fame, and perhaps rock n’ roll, was all situated in that house. Not only is it the birth of the man, but the birth of the characteristics that made him famous.

Experiences

The experiences of the site varied greatly. Most of the pilgrims did not follow a clear path around the site, were not annoyed by any of the other visitors, nor did they talk much to the other visitors. To most of the visitors interviewed, visiting the birthplace was

something “along the way.” It was not an obligatory trip to most, although most suggested that it was not an ordinary trip. Most responded by explaining that the area gave a historical experience, and as one man explained, it gave a past, present, and future perspective of Elvis’s life.

The emotions felt at the site were a combination of happiness and sadness. There were also themes of nostalgia. One visitor said that there was “too much happiness to talk to others,” although this was not a consensus. This suggests a strong emotional attachment to the area that did in fact affect how he behaved at the site. One visitor found inspiration to continue learning the guitar, while one visitor was inspired to “keep going” in his idea of a currently weak economy. His own experiences within the current economy made him parallel his experiences to the past experiences of Elvis. Similar to Kruse’s narrative of Strawberry Fields, the sacredness of the location was experienced due to identity. The man who was inspired to “keep going” identified himself through economic status. Likewise, the visitors who identified themselves with other sacred objects of the birthplace such as guitars, cars, or gospel music, were identifying themselves based on common objects shared between Elvis and themselves. Perhaps the glory of Elvis Presley can be best understood in the identification process. Since Elvis relates to multiple music genres, entertainment mediums, and historical events, this wide variety of multi-identifying experiences has developed Elvis into an international celebrity.

Interestingly, Graceland entered the conversation again when asking one visitor about his experiences at the birthplace. He explained that he was experiencing a

“spectrum” of Elvis’s life. On one end was the humble beginning of the birthplace and on the other end was the extravagant ending of Graceland. He humorously said that he did not experience the birthplace as “hallowed ground,” but was experiencing a starting point, or beginning that was symbolic and mythological to Elvis and Elvis’s fans. As one visitor explained, the beginnings were good to see, but they did not redefine who Elvis was. Therefore, he suggested that the birthplace was an opportunity to add to one’s knowledge of Elvis.

Many of the visitors mentioned that the staff at the birthplace played an important part in their experience at the site. As already shown by Graml (2005), pilgrims and locals can have separate views that contribute to the mythology of the site. Instead of negatively interfering with the experience, in a different way, many of the workers at the Elvis birthplace knew Elvis. Their own mythology has seeped back into the formation of the landscape and added a positive role of the interactions, experiences, and mythology that is being negotiated at the site. As shown by Andriotis (2009), the atmosphere of a sacred space can act as a cultural element that influences the experience of the space. In this scenario at Elvis’s birthplace, the staff of the birthplace acts as one of the many cultural elements that are affecting experiences of the pilgrims.

Mapping

The first choropleth map, U. S. Distribution of Visitors to the Elvis Birthplace in 2010, shows that the highest concentration of pilgrims to the Elvis birthplace is located in the South and Mid-West. Based on the interviews, there may be pilgrims from

Mississippi. Therefore, visitors from the South should not be dismissed from being pilgrims. The map also illustrates distance decay in the relationship between the pilgrims and the birthplace in Tupelo, Mississippi. The U. S. choropleth map could have a variety of factors influencing the distribution. Population trends in different parts of the country could determine the areas that are contributing the most visitors. Another factor could be transportation and interstate highway systems, especially if the birthplace is considered by so many to be a “stop along the way.”

Without a doubt, one of the most important factors contributing to the U. S. map and international maps is Graceland in Memphis, Tennessee. The closeness of the birthplace to Memphis provides a possible option for people to visit Graceland and the birthplace in one day by automobile. This strong relationship was elaborated further by the speaking to the director of the birthplace. He explained that both locations work very closely together and are constantly communicating with each other about projects and events.

The two choropleth maps showing the international distribution of visitors to the Elvis Birthplace in 2010 and 2011 illustrate a variety of themes. First, from looking at the data tables, there is a wide variety of countries that are contributing to the pilgrimage to the Elvis Presley birthplace. The majority of the pilgrims come from English speaking countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Further, one illustration of the map is that the majority of the pilgrims come from developed to higher developing countries. Due to the large variation in the data because of having a majority of countries with single digit numbers, the choropleth mapping technique does not portray the data

sufficiently. Therefore, using the sample data from 2011, a cartogram was made to illustrate the areas with the highest number of pilgrims. As already explained, the English speaking countries dominated the map, with the United Kingdom being the clear highest contributor to the international pilgrimage to Elvis Presley's birthplace.

One of the best stories of the distribution of the pilgrims comes from a conversation with the director of the birthplace, Dick Guyton (2011). He explained that on a yearly basis, there are more pilgrims from Australia that visit the site than from Tupelo, Mississippi. Adding to the interest in the distribution of the visitors, he explained that with the opening of the Toyota manufacturing facility in Tupelo, the number of Japanese visitors has risen drastically. He even said that on the day that the first car rolled off the assembly line in Tupelo, the birthplace hosted Ms. Toyota for the morning instead of the manufacturing facility because she and her husband are such big fans of Elvis.

Conclusion

I have shown that the elements described, the Elvis Presley birthplace is an area of what Campo (1998) described as a cultural religious heritage. Using a combination of interviews and mapping, the themes and data presented qualify the Elvis Presley birthplace as a place of secular pilgrimage. The area was shown to have a clear distinction of sacred space, which was in turn defined by the relics in the spaces that Elvis physically interacted with. The pilgrim related to these symbols based off of strong, varied mythological content. They desired to come into contact with the relic, which could therefore be viewed as a bridge between the pilgrim and the sacred entity.

The pilgrimage site consisted of a search for a central idea of socio-cultural meaning. At the Elvis Presley birthplace, the premise of a sacred, secular pilgrimage is taking place. Decisions are passing through communication. This communication is negotiated on the pilgrim's sense of place. As the sacred space is developed, behaviors are influenced. Most interestingly about Elvis, this research shows that Elvis Presley was a multi-faceted celebrity who connected to all different types of people with multiple characteristics. All of these characteristics were affected by the myths, symbols, and experiences of the area.

This study used the categories of myths, symbols, and experiences to understand the perceptions of the pilgrims. A mapping component was also used to illustrate the international spatial distribution of pilgrims to the birthplace. The mythological element of the interviews revealed that many different myths are brought to the birthplace from many different types of people. The symbolic element showed that identification with the

sacred begins to appear as the pilgrim explains the significance of certain objects. This identity thus relates back to the myths, but is influential in the experiences perceived at the site. These experiences show how different elements combine together to shape the perceptions and inspirations of the pilgrim. Lastly, the mapping component illustrates the location of the majority of the pilgrims coming from the Southern region in the U. S., and the United Kingdom on an international scale.

In conclusion, the Elvis Presley birthplace may be a “stop along the way,” but it is also much more meaningful than that. It is a site of secular pilgrimage. It is a site of mythological significance, symbolic relevance, and experiential closeness to Elvis Presley. Even more, it is a place to identify with The King.

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